



Washington State Department of Agriculture

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WSDA announces decision in Thurston County petition to restrict pesticides

Agency will pursue other measures to protect honey bees for now

OLYMPIA – After a 60-day review period, the [Washington State Department of Agriculture](#) (WSDA) has decided not to pursue rulemaking to limit the use of neonicotinoid insecticides on ornamental plants.

On April 8, the Thurston County Board of Commissioners petitioned WSDA to develop rules that would restrict most homeowners from purchasing neonicotinoid insecticides for use on ornamental plants. The rule would require anyone using such insecticides to obtain a pesticide applicators license from WSDA. Neonicotinoids are used on crops, as well as landscape ornamentals, including trees, shrubs and flowers, to control aphids, weevils and other insects.

WSDA sent a letter today to the Thurston County Board of Commissioners explaining its decision.

“WSDA shares your concerns about honey bee colony health and is acutely aware of the importance of honey bees and other pollinators to the economy and the environment of Washington,” Director Bud Hover stated in the letter.

“There is currently no documented evidence that the use of the neonicotinoid insecticides on ornamental plants is causing a significant adverse effect on honey bee colony health in Washington state,” Hover said. “Because it has not been established that this use is a significant contributor to the decline of honey bee colonies in Thurston County or elsewhere in the state, the proposed use restrictions are not appropriate at this time.”

According to pollinator experts, including officials with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Environmental Protection Agency, there are multiple factors playing a role in the decline of honey bee colonies. Officials cite parasites and disease, genetics, poor nutrition and pesticide exposure. The USDA issued a 72-page document, the [Report on the National Stakeholders Conference on Honey Bee Health](#), in May. It discusses issues on the health of pollinators.

To help protect pollinators, Hover directed WSDA staff to monitor the results of studies in progress regarding the health of pollinating bees.

MORE

June 6, 2013

In addition, WSDA will:

- Urge the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to consider whether additional use restrictions are needed when the products are applied to ornamental plants. EPA is currently reviewing uses of neonicotinoid insecticides and revamping the pollinator risk assessment process for all pesticides.
- Provide technical assistance to pesticide applicators licensed to apply insecticides to ornamental plants, reminding them of their responsibility to protect pollinators.
- Assist retail trade organizations in providing pollinator protection information to home and garden pesticide users.

Click [here](#) to read the letter WSDA sent to Thurston County in response to the commissioners' request to restrict the use of neonicotinoid insecticides.

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